65p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

151

A female pope?
Eugene Aram: innocent?
Zigmund Jan Adamski
More than mere pets
The miracle machine

Aus $1.85 NZ $1.80 SA R1.85 US $1.85 IR 85p

THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 13 Issue 151

Consultants to The Unexplained
Professor A. J. Ellison
Dr J. Allen Hynek
Brian Inglis
Colin Wilson

Editorial Director
Brian Innes
Editor
Peter Brookesmith
Deputy Editor
Lynn Picknett
Executive Editor
Lesley Riley
Sub Editors
Chris Cooper
Jenny Dawson
Shona Grimbly
Hildi Hawkins

Picture Researchers
Anne Horton
Paul Snelgrove
Frances Vargo
Editorial Manager
Clare Byatt
Art Editor
Stephen Westcott
Designer
Richard Burgess
Art Buyer
Jean Hardy
Production Co-ordinator
Nicky Bowden

Circulation Director
David Breed
Marketing Director
Michael Joyce

Contents

Eugene Aram
A QUESTION OF GUILT 3001
We investigate one of the most famous 18th-century murder mysteries: was the condemned man really innocent?
Frank Smyth

Von Mehesz's machine
THE MIRACLE MACHINE 3006
The Hungarian therapist Von Mehesz claims to have invented a machine that can vitalise people, animals and crops . . .
Richard Deacon

Zigmund Jan Adamski
DEATH OF A FAMOUS NAME 3010
His name was Adamski and his body was found on a Yorkshire coaltip; ufologists became very interested
Jenny Randles

Pope Joan
THE LADY IS A POPE? 3014
Was there ever, as legend recounts, a female pope? We look at the curious stories surrounding Pope Joan
Graham Fuller and Ian Knight

Animal intelligence
A LITTLE GIVE AND TAKE 3018
We give our pets love – but recent research indicates that they can actually reduce our stress and depression
Francis King

Picture acknowldegements
Cover: Photri; Jean-Loup Charmet (inset); **3001–3002:** North Yorks County Library; **3003:** North Yorks County Library (t); Topham (c); Frank Newbould (b); **3004–3005:** North Yorks County Library; **3006:** Paul Snelgrove; **3007:** James Phillips (c); Stephen von Mehesz (b); **3008:** Paul Snelgrove (t); Stephen von Mehesz (c); **3009:** Stephen von Mehesz; **3010:** Peter Warrington; **3010–3011:** Syndication International; **3012:** Peter Warrington (t); Syndication International (b); **3013:** John Frost Collection; **3014:** Jean-Loup Charmet (t); Scala (b); **3015:** Giraudon (t); **3016:** BBC Hulton Picture Library (c); Mary Evans Picture Library (b); **3017:** Bodleian Library (b); **3019:** Spectrum (c); Karlis Osis (b); **3020:** Oxford Scientific Films (t); Zoological Society of London (c)

© 1983 Orbis Publishing Limited. Typesetting by Servis Filmsetting Limited. Reproduction by La Cromolito, Milan. Printed in Great Britain by Jarrold & Sons Ltd, Norwich 25838

In next week's issue
The master of the macabre, **Edgar Allan Poe**, has terrified millions with his stories of premature burial, torture and murder; all, of course, works of fiction – but were they? Was Poe himself a murderer? The alleged UFO attack at **Livingston**, Scotland, has proved to be one of Britain's most controversial close encounters: we summarise the findings of the experts. Voices of the dead were regularly heard at the seances of the 'medium' **William Roy**. The evidence, however, suggests he was a fraud. And the great mystic **Emanuel Swedenborg** lived, so it was believed, in both the world of spirits and that of living people – which is why the spirits called him 'the unaccountable one'. Lastly, in **Sacred geometry** we look at the curious fascination of the ancient world with the idea of perfect symmetry.
Place your order now!

The Unexplained UK 65p. IR 85p. Aus. $1.85. NZ $1.80. SA R1.85. USA $1.85.
How to obtain copies of The Unexplained Copies are obtained by placing a regular order at your newsagent, or by taking out a subscription.
Subscription Rates
For six months (26 issues) £18.90, for one year (52 issues) £37.80. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.
Back numbers
U.K. & Eire: Back Nos are obtainable at cover price from your newsagent or from The Unexplained Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT – post free.
Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta: Back Nos are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.
How to obtain binders for The Unexplained
U.K. and Eire: Send a cheque/postal order for £3.25 per binder (incl. p & p) payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd to: The Unexplained Binders, Orbis House, 22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT. Please state the volume numbers required.
Australia: Binders are available through your local newsagent. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic. 3001.
New Zealand: Binders are available through your local newsagent or from The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (NZ) Ltd, PO Box 1595, Wellington.
South Africa: Binders are available through your local newsagent or through any branch of Central News Agency. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Intermag, PO Box 57394, Springfield 2137.
Europe: Write with remittance of £4.00 per binder (including postage and packing) payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd, to The Unexplained Binders, Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT, England, being sure to state the volume number(s) required.
Malta: Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.25. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Miller (Malta) Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

NOTE: Binders and Back Numbers are obtainable subject to availability of stocks. Whilst every attempt is made to keep the price of issues and binders constant, the publishers reserve the right to increase the stated prices at any time when circumstances dictate. Binders depicted in this publication are those produced for the **U.K. market only** and may not necessarily be identical to binders produced for sale outside the U.K.
Binders and issues may be subject to import duty and/or local taxes which are not included in the above prices unless stated.

A question of guilt

Poems, plays and novels have celebrated the case of Eugene Aram, a respected teacher and scholar condemned for the murder of a shoemaker. But was he guilty? FRANK SMYTH re-opens the files

ONE OF THE MOST frequently recurring names of Victorian romantic fiction and drama was that of Eugene Aram. In 1829 the poet Thomas Hood set the literary ball rolling with his narrative poem *The dream of Eugene Aram*, which quickly became a favourite piece for drawing-room recitation. In 1831 Bulwer Lytton's novel *Eugene Aram* followed suit, running into 20 editions in England alone during the next decade, as well as being translated into French and German. By the following year the novel had been dramatised and enjoyed a long run at the Surrey Theatre in London.

Over 40 years later, in April 1873, the play was still top box office, opening at the Lyceum with the great actor Sir Henry Irving playing the lead. And in January 1902 another play about Aram, entitled *After all*, began at the Avenue Theatre, London, with the noted player Martin Harvey in the lead.

The official view of Eugene Aram: fleeing from the scene of his crime with the body of his victim on his back. Here he relives the scene in a nightmare – and devils swarm up from the earth to torment his guilty conscience. This lurid picture by Philip Spence illustrates Thomas Hood's poem *The dream of Eugene Aram*. But was Aram really guilty of the crime? Was he unjustly hanged?

Meanwhile, hardly a summer exhibition of the Royal Academy went by without some striking portrait of the ubiquitous Aram. Gustave Doré produced beautiful illustrations for a new edition of Hood's poem in 1872.

Who, then, was the real Eugene Aram? According to his Victorian popularisers he was the quintessential languorous poet and scholar, dragged from rustic seclusion and a passionate – though pure – affair with an aristocratic young lady pupil, to face a crime he could not have committed. On the other hand, contemporary 18th-century records state that he was 'justly hanged', on 6 August 1759 at what is now York racecourse, for a particularly sordid murder.

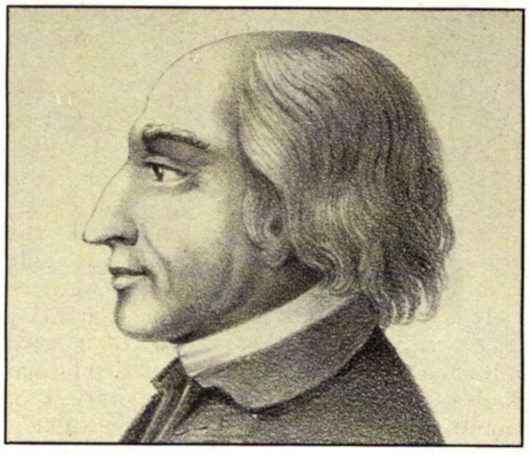
Eugene Aram – christened Eugenius – was born on 2 October 1704 at the village of Ramsgill, in Nidderdale in the West Riding of Yorkshire. His father Peter was a well-known gardener and amateur poet. The family moved a few miles away to Newby Hall, the home of Sir Edward Blackett, when Eugene was six. There Peter Aram landscaped the grounds while his son studied botany with Sir Edward, at the same time

learning to read and write. When Blackett died in 1718, the precociously clever boy was taken to London to work for a while at the Blackett family offices in the city. There he rapidly learned mathematics to such a degree of proficiency that he was able to teach the subject in later years. He also began to study Latin and Greek, and when he returned north to Ripon, where his father was now in the service of Sir John Ingleby, he began his long career as a schoolmaster.

For about 10 years he taught in a room at Gouthwaite Hall, 2 miles (3 kilometres) from his native Ramsgill. Here he was described as being 'a somewhat rigid disciplinarian, but a famous scholar'. By May 1731 he was well enough established to be able to marry Anna Spence. Three years later the couple moved 15 miles (24 kilometres) to Knaresborough, where Aram set up his own school.

Here Aram became a pillar of the community. According to an otherwise hostile pamphlet published after his execution:

> through the general estimation and opinion gentlemen had of his uncommon abilities and extensive learning, he was always looked upon and treated in a more genteel and respectable manner than people of his station . . . generally are. His way of living and outward deportment were most remarkably unblameable for many years. . . . He was most upright and fair in all dealings and transactions he had with other people, of great outward tenderness. . . .



Right: Eugene Aram as he looked about the time of his trial. This portrait is taken from a phrenological study of his skull, which was cut from Aram's remains as they hung in the gibbet

Below: Knaresborough, on the River Nidd in North Yorkshire. Aram had lived here for over 10 years when his associate Daniel Clark disappeared. Aram himself left the town only a few weeks later, without any explanation to his wife, and did not return until his arrest on a murder charge 13 years later

His home life, however, was not happy. Though his wife Anna bore him at least eight children, two of whom died in infancy, he was later to blame his being brought to trial on her. She appeared to be friendly with a shoemaker named Daniel Clark, who had 'bettered himself' by marrying a woman with a small fortune of £300 and was able to keep a horse in livery stables. Furthermore, Aram, according to his detractors, showed homosexual tendencies. It was said that he dressed a boy in woman's clothing in order to torment Anna by pretending he was having an affair. He also occasionally drank at a 'low tavern' named the Crown at Knaresborough, kept by a dubious character named Henry Terry, who, along with his regular customer Francis Iles, was rumoured to be a receiver of

stolen goods. Another regular there was Richard Houseman, a small trader in woollens.

On the snowy, moonlit night of 7 February 1745, Daniel Clark was seen by several neighbours in Knaresborough at 'an unaccustomed late hour', the last occasion being at 3 a.m. The following day he had disappeared, though his horse remained in the livery stable. The apparent reason was made clear in the *York Courant* a month later. In a paragraph describing the missing Clark as 'a thin, pale-looking pock-broke man aged about 23 years', the journal stated that he had 'defrauded several persons' of a variety of goods, including 'silver pints and quarts,

Below: the wild-eyed Aram kills Clark. In this somewhat imaginative illustration, Clark has become an aged man, and the scene of the crime is a moonlit cemetery

Below right: Aram and Richard Houseman were said to have buried the corpse in St Robert's Cave, which can still be seen today (bottom). Houseman disclosed the whereabouts of the remains, but denied that he had been involved in the killing

diamonds and gold rings', snuff boxes, watches and valuable books. Later it became clear that he had also absconded with what must have been a large quantity of leather, valued at £45. Altogether goods worth about £150 had vanished with Clark, and it was later discovered by his wife that £200 in cash and plate had gone from his house.

At about this time Aram appeared to be unusually wealthy. Arrested for a debt, he procured his immediate discharge by producing upwards of 100 guineas in coin from his breeches pocket. He seems, too, to have paid off a large mortgage on his house. Clark's creditors searched Aram's house and found some of the missing goods. They included a quantity of velvets and woollens buried in his garden. Aram was arrested for having possessed himself of some of the goods that Clark had obtained fraudulently. But the charge could not be proved, and he was released.

The *York Courant* advertised a £15 reward for any news of Clark, but as the months went by the hue and cry died down. In April Eugene Aram left his wife and children for a visit to relatives in Nottingham. He did not return. According to his later story he went from there to London and took up a teaching post at an academy in Piccadilly. Meanwhile he studied Hebrew and Celtic with a view to publishing a huge work on comparative philology.

Aram's studies in London continued for over 12 years. Then, at Christmas 1757, he answered an advertisement for an usher at King's Lynn Grammar School in Norfolk, and took up his post there in February.

At the school he was a popular classics master. He also took the boys for walks and taught them practical botany. One of his pupils was James Burney, later a distinguished rear-admiral and brother of Fanny Burney, the diarist. He recalled Aram's tenderness when on one occasion he had lifted a worm from the garden path 'so that it should not be trodden upon'. But he also remembered, he said, how Aram gave the boys a fascinating impromptu talk on murder, reading to them from a pamphlet, *The discovery of secret murders*, which had been published by W. Chace of Norwich at about that time.

This was a curious coincidence, for in Knaresborough that summer events involving murder were already determining the schoolmaster's fate.

On 1 August 1758, a labourer digging on Thistle Hill near the town found what appeared to be a human bone. Digging further he found a complete skeleton. The following week local magistrates held two inquests on the remains. According to two doctors who had examined them, they were only a few

years old. The name of the missing Daniel Clark cropped up: no other person, it was alleged, had gone missing in recent years in the locality.

Suspicions had long been entertained that Richard Houseman and Francis Iles, along with the shady innkeeper Henry Terry, might know something of the missing man's whereabouts. Now they were questioned by the magistrates. Shown one of the bones, Houseman made a fatal error. 'That's no more Dan Clark's bone than it is mine!' he blustered. Pressed on the question of how he could know this, he claimed that an acquaintance had seen Clark on the road from Knaresborough some time after his disappearance. But then he changed tack and

said that he had heard that there was another skeleton to be found in St Robert's Cave.

The magistrate was a bluff man named William Thornton, who had raised a regiment, the Yorkshire Blues, during the rebellion of 1745. He was assisted in the investigation by John Metcalfe, the road-builder famous as Blind Jack O'Knaresborough. They ordered an examination of the cave. Deep inside was found a second skeleton, the back of the skull crushed inwards as from a heavy blow.

Following this sensational find there was an equally sensational intervention: Anna Aram asked to see the magistrate. To the astonishment of the examining court, she declared that she believed her missing husband, along with Houseman and an unknown assistant, to have killed Clark on the night he disappeared. She had seen the four go off together; later Houseman, Aram and their other companion had returned alone. Aram and Houseman had entered her kitchen and ordered a fire to be built up. There they had burned what she believed to be quantities of clothing, judging by 'pieces of linnen' that she found next morning. She also claimed that Houseman, who was bald and normally wore a wig, had asked for a handkerchief to cover his head against the cold. On its return it was spotted with blood.

Right: Aram walking with his wife. Their relationship was never a very happy one: he was said to have felt himself to be 'above her' and would not deign to speak to her in public. Her denunciation of him, though not acceptable as testimony in court – a wife could not testify against her husband – was nonetheless a terrible vengeance on him

Far right: Eugene Aram broods darkly at one of the schools at which he taught after absconding from Knaresborough. This picture is based, of course, on the view that Aram was guilty of the murder

Below right: Aram, as portrayed on the stage by Sir Henry Irving, is arrested at King's Lynn by policemen sent from Knaresborough

The arrest of Aram

Aram's whereabouts in Norfolk seem to have been known to the court – a point that should surely be counted in his defence, for neither in London nor King's Lynn had he made any effort to change his name. On 18 August, the inquest accused Houseman and Aram of being Clark's joint murderers, and two constables were dispatched southwards in a post-chaise to apprehend Aram. Shortly afterwards, to quote Thomas Hood:

Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn
Through the cold and heavy mists
And Eugene Aram walked between
With gyves upon his wrists.

Shortly afterwards he was taken to be examined by magistrate Thornton. He remained ice-cool and said that he knew Daniel Clark of old but remembered very little of him and had no knowledge of his murder. To the specific charge of having been with Clark on the night of his disappearance, Aram merely said that he 'could not recollect'.

Later that month Aram and Houseman were lodged in York prison with Terry, the innkeeper. Terry was alleged to have received goods that had been embezzled by Clark and then stolen from him after his murder. The men remained in prison for a year. In March 1759 Houseman agreed to turn King's Evidence in exchange for his life. He said that on the night of Clark's disappearance he and Aram, with Henry Terry and Francis Iles, had met Clark and ascertained the whereabouts of the goods they knew he had obtained on credit. Afterwards Aram had lured the shoemaker to St Robert's Cave and had been seen to hit him over the back of the head, dragging the body into the cave mouth. Aram had emerged, washed his hands in the nearby river, and then threatened Houseman with his life if he ever spoke of the incident again.

This was substantially the case for the prosecution when it came before Mr Justice Noel on Friday, 3 August 1759. The leading prosecuting counsel was Fletcher Norton, KC, known at the bar as 'Sir Bull-Face Double-Fee'. Norton was heartily disliked by such contemporaries as Horace Walpole and John Wilkes. According to Lord Mansfield, he 'was very likely to mislead a jury, and with him I felt it more difficult to prevent injustice being done than with any person whoever practised before me.'

When Aram took the stand he began by apologising for his unfamiliarity with court practice, and 'humbly solicited' the judge's attention 'while I, single and unskilful, destitute of friends, and unassisted by counsel, say something, perhaps, like argument in my own defence.'

For the next hour, speaking in a quiet, firm voice, he placed before the court what the 19th-century barrister Norison Scatcherd was to call the finest defence ever. First he pointed out the respectability of his life, both at Knaresborough and at King's Lynn. Second, he recalled that at the time of the

crime a 'distemper' had reduced him to using crutches for almost half a year. How could he, in these circumstances, 'without power – without motive – without means', accomplish such a deed?

Third, he said that deeds of this kind were invariably to support some 'avarice, luxury, or malice . . . yet I lay not under the influence of any one of these . . . none . . . who knew me will ever question this.'

Aram then went on to refute the suggestion that the disappearance of Clark meant that he was dead and not merely living quietly somewhere. Then, challenging the medical evidence, Aram asked if any method existed of being certain of the sex of a skeleton. (At that time it did not.) He also cited seven or eight instances of bones being found in caves and 'hermitages' of the same type as St Robert's. Who, except the 'Eternal Omniscience' was to say to whom they had belonged? On the question of the injury to the skull, had it been made before or after death? He pointed out that the bones of William, Archbishop of York, had been disinterred in 1783, and 'the bones of the skull were found broken; yet certainly he died by no violence.'

Then there was the fact that after the Reformation holy places had been despoiled and ransacked: there were many instances of bones being smashed in 'sacred' graves and tombs. Furthermore, Knaresborough Castle had seen its share of violence, being besieged during the Civil War and all but demolished. How could they tell that these bones, lying not far away, were not those of a victim of the war? Finally, he instanced half a dozen cases of people who had disappeared about the time of a murder or supposed murder and had been wrongly tried – to be exonerated only when their 'victims' turned up, or the true murderer was caught, much later. He concluded:

> I at last, after a year's confinement, equal to either fortune, put myself upon the candour, the justice, the humanity of your lordship, and upon yours, my countrymen, gentlemen of the jury.

In later years, Aram's address in his defence was to be favourably noticed by many writers on jurisprudence – particularly forensic medicine. But at the time it did little for him; for reasons that are today unknown, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. He was sentenced to be hanged at Knavesmire on the following Monday, and afterwards wrapped in canvas, tarred, and suspended from a gibbet in Knaresborough Forest.

He spent the weekend in frantic writing: sending notes on his life to Rev. Collins, vicar of Knaresborough, and making alterations to his massive lexicon of Hebrew, Celtic, Greek and Latin terms. This activity, at least, bore fruit, for in 1777 his claims as a scholar were recognised in Kippis's *Biographica Britannica* and in 1784 in Adelung's German *Lexicon*.

When the officials and the Rev. Collins came for Aram in the 'condemned hole' of York Castle – in which Dick Turpin had languished some years previously – they found a carefully worded justification of suicide, a short poem, and a bloody razor. Aram had slashed his left arm. Surgeons revived him sufficiently for him to be taken to the gallows, though, according to one spectator, even before he was 'turned off' he looked 'dead as a stone'.

A lesson to malefactors

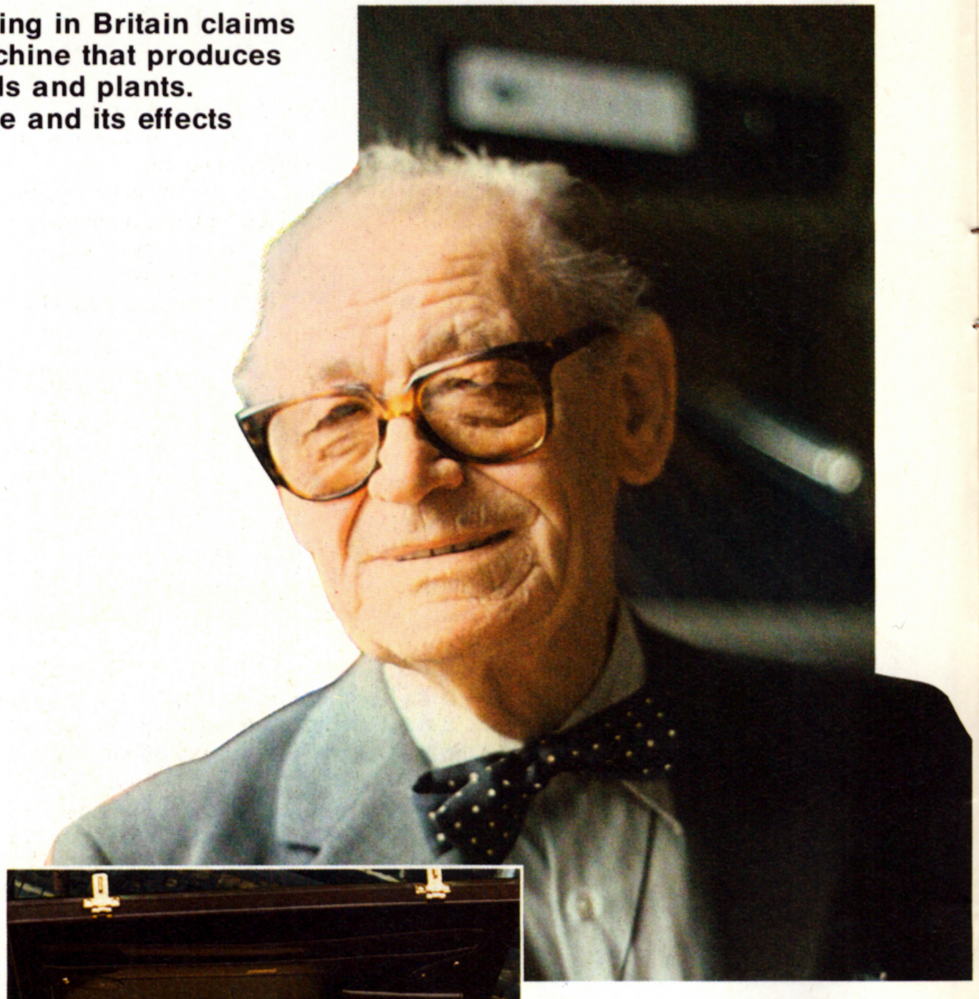
Aram's body hung on the gibbet for nearly 20 years as a lesson to malefactors, gradually falling to pieces. One story had it that his youngest daughter carefully collected the bits as they fell and reverently buried them. One Dr Hutchinson of Knaresborough finally removed the skull from the iron hoops, cutting it in two down the median line to free it. Subsequently it found its way into the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Henry Terry the innkeeper was acquitted and disappeared after a mob tried to burn down his inn. Both Houseman and the mysterious Iles were hounded all their days. When Houseman died in 1777 he was removed from Knaresborough 'for fear the dead body should be torn to pieces by the inhabitants.'

Now, apart from a few contemporary records and the enigmatic hinged skull, nothing remains of Eugene Aram except a shelf-full of melodramatic Victorian literature – and, of course, the tantalising question: did he do it or didn't he? Despite a wealth of argument pro and con, it seems unlikely that the truth will ever be known.

The miracle machine

A Hungarian-born physiotherapist living in Britain claims to have invented a sonic healing machine that produces miraculous results on people, animals and plants. RICHARD DEACON reports on the device and its effects



Above: Stephen von Mehesz, inventor of the sonic healing box that has apparently treated cases of migraine, broken limbs, muscle injury and arthritis with amazing success

Left: the portable model of von Mehesz's machine is small enough to fit into a briefcase; it runs off batteries, making it easy to use in the farms and stables where von Mehesz treats his animal patients

STEPHEN VON MEHESZ is a larger-than-life character with an insouciant air that seems to suggest surprise at his own achievements. Indeed, there is something puckish about him, although von Mehesz is too earthy and practical a person to be called a mystic; yet he undoubtedly has talents that can be classed as paranormal. And he has invented a healing machine that baffles scientists.

Born in Hungary in 1912, Stephen von Mehesz witnessed quite early in life the healing gifts of his mother. He once watched her heal a sick bird. Later, when his own pet bantam broke a wing he dealt with it in similar fashion, cosseting the bird in his bedroom; the damaged wing healed quite quickly. This talent for healing has remained with him into adult life: he recalls how some children once brought an inert hamster to him, saying it was dead. 'Instinctively,' he said, 'I picked up the animal and touched its ear.' Immediately, the animal came to life and promptly ran away. 'How could I explain the situation to small children?' he asked. 'The centre of balance is in the ear, and I think [the animal's] reaction had something to do with this.' Obviously the hamster had completely recovered from whatever had ailed it.

Eventually von Mehesz joined the Hungarian Army, and became a major in the military intelligence service. This experience, allied to his own sixth sense, developed his essential practicality and latent talents – later this was to prove of enormous benefit.

In 1944, with the Soviet invasion of Hungary imminent, von Mehesz fled from Budapest and eventually managed to reach Britain. After staying for a short time with the famous film-maker Sir Alexander Korda, a family friend, he tried to join the British Army. Despite the fact that he was a highly skilled and experienced intelligence officer, he was turned down; instead the Ministry of Labour directed him to work as a stoker at the Dorchester Gas Works.

After a spell at the gas works, he became a bus conductor; a lengthy chat one day with one of his passengers, who was a hospital matron, encouraged him to embark on the study of physiotherapy and osteopathy. He qualified as a physiotherapist, and since 1960 has practised as such from his home in Dorchester.

Throughout his professional career, von Mehesz has tried to apply to his work his own distilled wisdom, which includes elements of Hungarian gipsy folklore, a smattering of acupuncture learned from a Chinese and, perhaps most important, a feeling that he had a mission to heal people. As von Mehesz himself put it, 'I also wanted to prove to the Home Office that when they gave me British citizenship, I could do something for my new countrymen in return.'

What he did was to develop the von Mehesz sonic bleep machine, the result of

many years of experiment. The prototype (now in his 'surgery' at Hope Lodge in Dorchester) measures about 2 feet (60 centimetres) square by 1 foot (30 centimetres) high, and looks rather like a piece of hi-fi equipment at first glance. It incorporates a cathode-ray oscilloscope, and runs from the electricity supply. The later, commercial model is smaller and portable; it fits into a briefcase and is battery powered. Von Mehesz says of his invention:

> My machine is based on the theory of using sonic energy to cure. It has taken me 12 years to perfect the theory and the machine, which exemplifies a completely new law of physics based on sound. Electricity is used to power sonic beams of varying strengths, and these are directed to vital parts of the body by carefully placed pads. The basic principles of the machine can be easily grasped. . . . But it has succeeded beyond even my wildest dreams.

Von Mehesz using his prototype machine to treat a client for migraine. In directing the sonic energy to the legs and feet he is using, he says, a form of reflex therapy; he claims this method is highly successful in curing cases of migraine

Although the astonishing performance of the machine is something that even its inventor cannot easily explain, it is thought that the special frequency used produces sound waves that agitate living cells to such an extent that they shed any toxic substances they contain. However, there may also be some human element involved. As von Mehesz himself has suggested: 'Sometimes I wonder whether it is a question of the machine plus myself doing the trick . . . whether some healing talent of my own doesn't come into it.'

I myself was treated by the machine for an arthritic hip condition. Two wet pads were strapped across my hip; clips were attached to the pads and linked up to the machine, which was then switched on. There is nothing dangerous about the treatment, nor is it unpleasant; the sensation was rather like a mechanical crab moving its claws gently over my body.

After about 20 minutes of the treatment all pain had gone, and I felt very fit and able to walk with ease. The feeling of well-being lasted two to three days, and had I been living in Dorchester I should certainly have continued with the treatment.

However the 'miracle box' has also achieved wonders for other people and even, rather surprisingly, for animals and crops.

Subjecting seeds to the treatment has a remarkable energising effect. The seeds are placed in a muslin bag and immersed in water; metal plates in the water connected to the machine transmit the sound waves through the water and 'irradiate' the seed. A Batcombe farmer, Mr Edward Vardy, had his barley seed treated by the machine before planting; the resulting bumper crop showed a 150 per cent increased yield compared with untreated seed, and was also completely free from disease.

Energetic plants

I have seen some outsize tomato plants grown from treated seed in von Mehesz's greenhouse; they had soared up to the roof. And an experimental plot of sugar beet grown from treated seed was sensationally successful, as Mr Arthur Cox of Dorchester testified. 'Sugar beet is always a difficult crop to get going,' he said, 'but as a result of this experiment there was a 100 per cent improvement. The beets were double their normal size.'

With people, the machine has been successful in treating rheumatism, rheumatoid and osteo-arthritis, fibrositis, sciatica, some fractures, dermatitis, lumbago and migraine. One sufferer from multiple sclerosis, who

Right: examples of outsize sugar beet, grown from seed treated by sonic energy, held up for inspection by von Mehesz and a farmer client

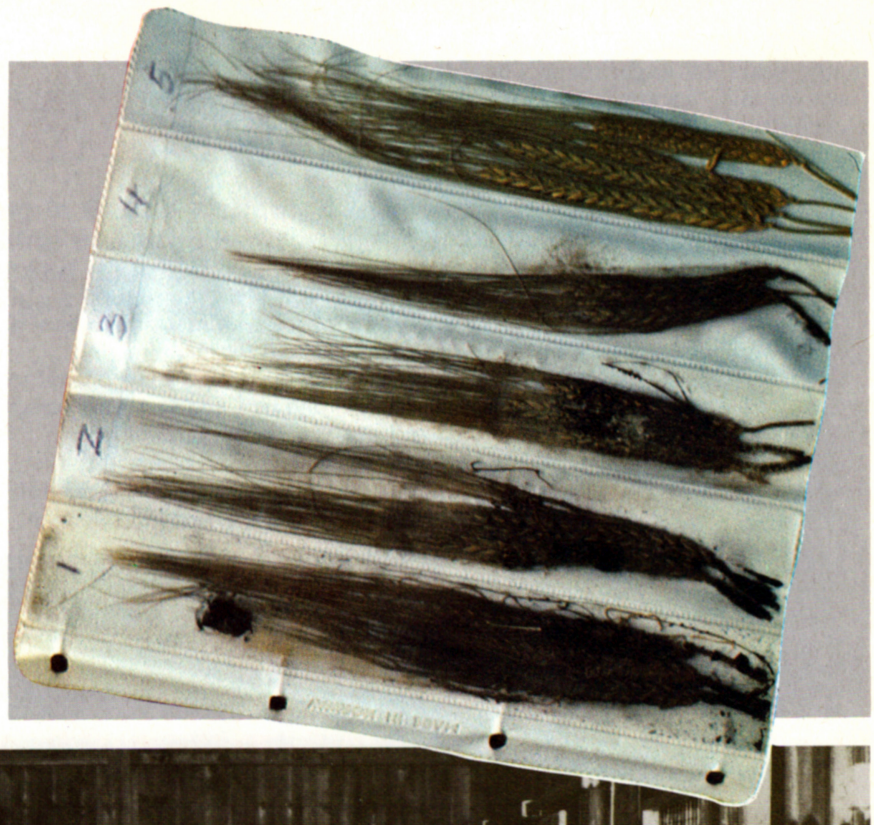
contracted the illness when he was 25, writes:

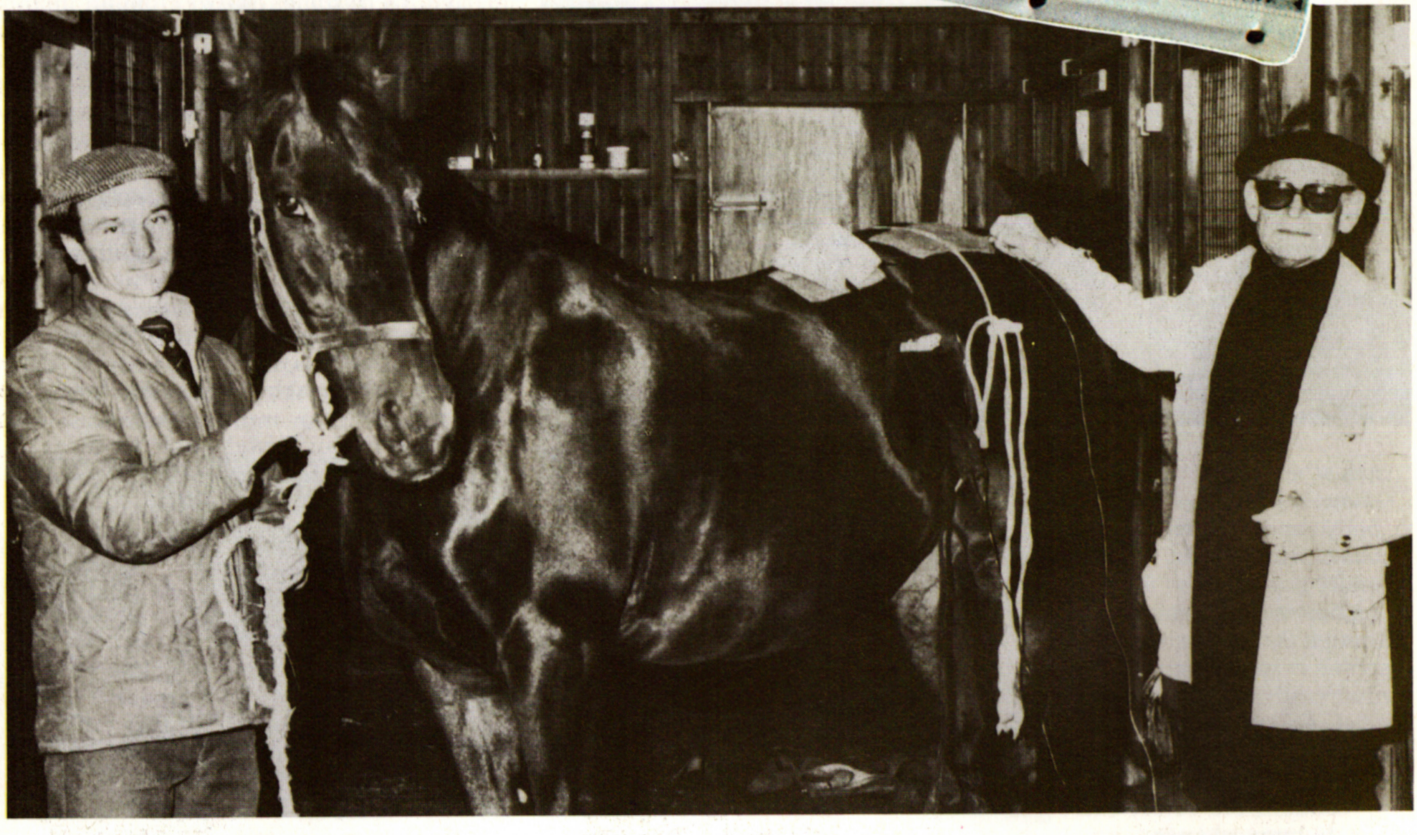
> Doctors have pointed out that there is nothing constructive they can do, as there is no known method of alleviating the symptoms. After four visits [to von Mehesz] I noticed that the coldness in the legs gradually disappeared, and for the first time in three years I was able to run on the spot, denoting a definite increase in mobility.

This client also said that he felt much less tired, and was now capable of playing with his small daughter. And four of his friends testified that he seemed 'much more resilient both physically and mentally.'

The landlord of a hotel in Dorchester recalls how he injured his back while moving beer barrels in 1977. From then on he was in constant pain, until he tried the von Mehesz machine. After just two treatments, he was cured: since that day, 'I haven't had any pain at all,' he said.

Some of von Mehesz's most amazing results have been achieved with animals. His machine has apparently saved the life of a severely injured fox-hound and a broken-down racehorse.





Top: heads of barley grown together in the same field; the topmost head, from seed treated by von Mehesz, was healthy, while the rest succumbed to a fungus infection

Above: the broken-down racehorse Northern Eclipse being treated by von Mehesz in the stables of Richard Mitchell (on left)

Mr Richard Mitchell, who runs a training stables in Dorset, was sent a four-year-old named Northern Eclipse from Yorkshire in December 1981; the horse was in such a bad state that it could not even trot. One of its hind legs would not bend at all: as a stable-hand said, 'It seemed to be just another case for the knacker's yard.'

For four months Stephen von Mehesz took his machine out to the stables once a week to treat the sick animal; at the end of this time the horse had not only recovered, but was able to race again. He has since raced at Salisbury and in Belgium, where he actually won. 'This was no one-horse fluke,' said Mr Mitchell, adding

> Stephen has been here twice a week to wire up other lame horses. What I have seen him achieve is almost unbelievable. A point-to-pointer was brought to my stables quite lame, yet became 100 per cent fit after only two treatments. Another horse that had

> slipped and torn a muscle during exercise was perfectly normal again after one session on the machine. Yet another horse that had dragged a hind foot for several months . . . recovered after six treatments.

And the machine also cured Mr Mitchell's wife of the persistent migraine from which she had suffered for several years.

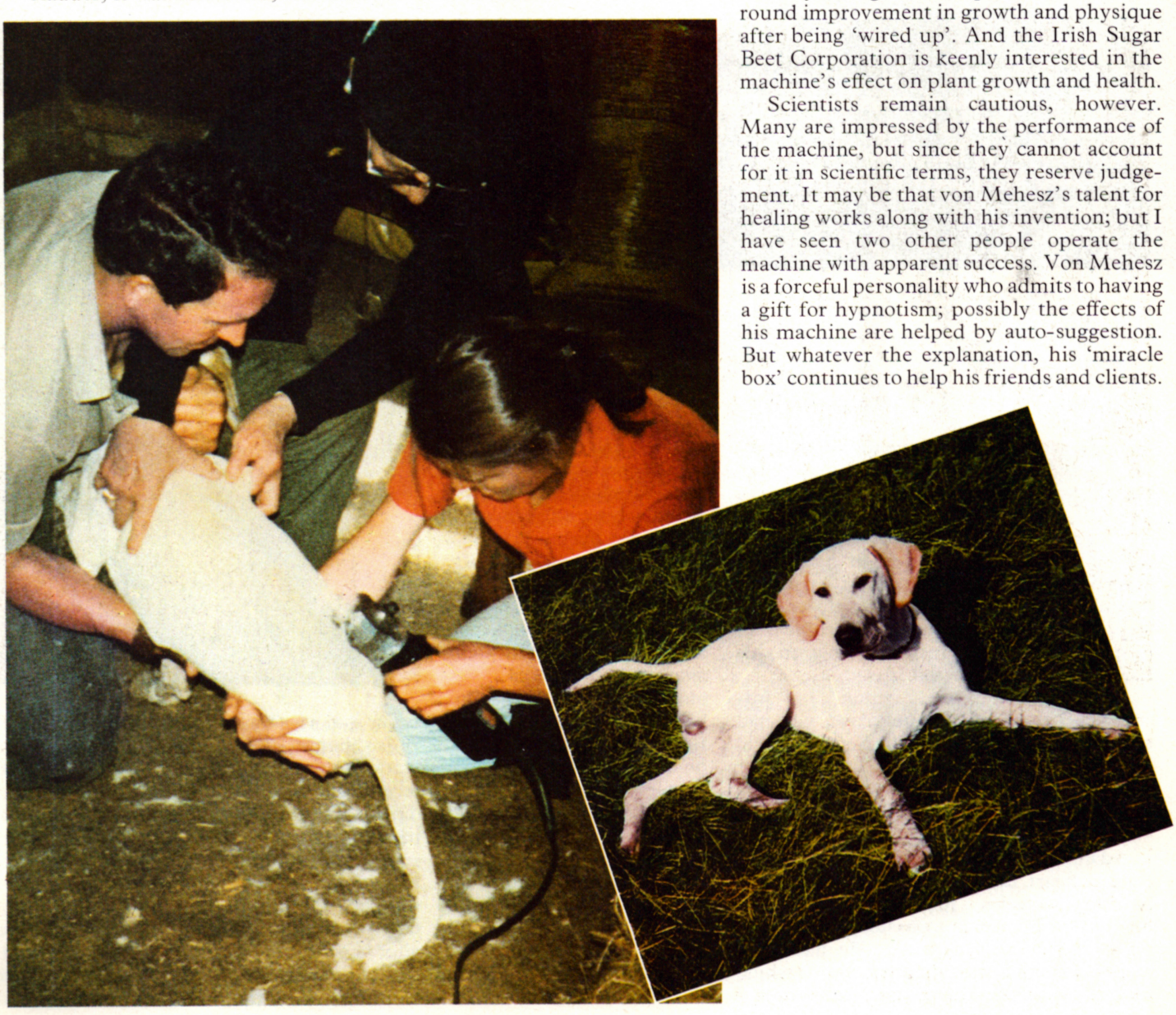
But von Mehesz's most impressive success story must be the case of Bowman, a 10-month-old fox-hound that had been seriously injured when it was kicked and battered by a cow; X-rays showed a fracture of the spine and dislocation of the last lumbar vertebra. The veterinary surgeon suggested that the animal should be put down.

As a last resort it was decided that the animal should be taken to the Mitchell stables for treatment on the von Mehesz machine. 'When I first saw the animal,' von Mehesz said:

> it had lost all control of bowel and bladder, it was emaciated, and the two paralysed legs were just skin and bone. . . . If the hound had been a human specimen, his ailment would have been called paraplegia and only a neuro-surgeon could have done anything for him. Even so, in only two cases out of 100 is the operation partially successful.

Amazingly, after five weeks' treatment, Bowman was almost back to normal. He started to put on weight, began chasing other dogs, and his bowel and bladder control returned. 'Today', said von Mehesz, 'he is exercising with Mr Mitchell's horses, and running around the farm.'

Bowman, the injured fox-hound cured by von Mehesz, was emaciated and partly paralysed when treatment was started (below). Five weeks later the dog was almost back to normal (below right) and able to run about



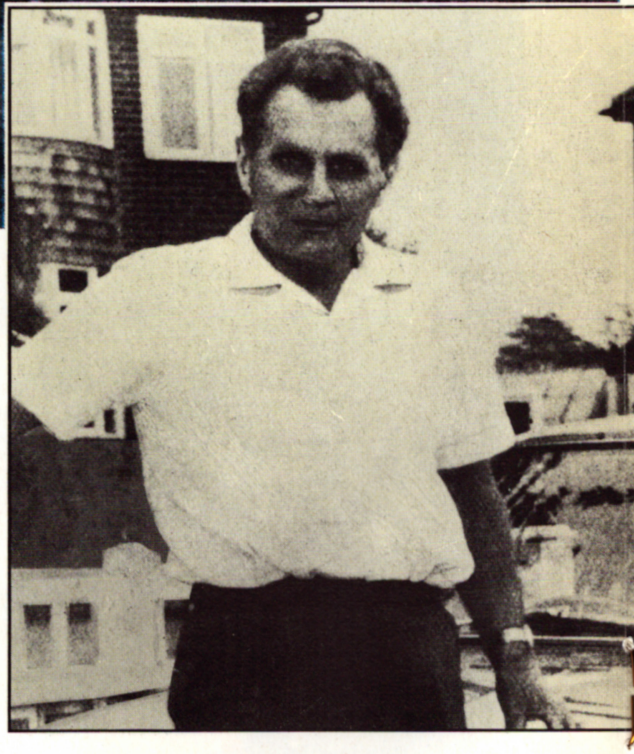
Tests and experiments

Tests with the machine have been carried out at Cardiff University and at the Royal Infirmary and University at Hull in connection with the treatment of fractures and neurological ailments. Experiments are also being conducted at a stud farm in Yorkshire, where yearlings have responded with an all-round improvement in growth and physique after being 'wired up'. And the Irish Sugar Beet Corporation is keenly interested in the machine's effect on plant growth and health.

Scientists remain cautious, however. Many are impressed by the performance of the machine, but since they cannot account for it in scientific terms, they reserve judgement. It may be that von Mehesz's talent for healing works along with his invention; but I have seen two other people operate the machine with apparent success. Von Mehesz is a forceful personality who admits to having a gift for hypnotism; possibly the effects of his machine are helped by auto-suggestion. But whatever the explanation, his 'miracle box' continues to help his friends and clients.

Death of a famous name

In 1980 a man went missing from his West Yorkshire home and days later his body was found in bizarre circumstances. But it was his name – Adamski – that first interested ufologists in the case. JENNY RANDLES reports



Above: the coaltip in the small West Yorkshire town of Todmorden where the body of Zigmund Jan Adamski (right, with his wife Lottie) was found on 11 June 1980. Adamski had been missing from his home in Tingley, near Wakefield, for five days; his body bore a bizarre burn mark – and there was no clue as to how he got on top of the coaltip. The name of the dead man – the same as that of the most famous alleged 'UFO contactee' – aroused the interest of ufologists. Had Adamski been abducted by a UFO? Had his body been dumped on the coaltip *from above*?

ON A MISERABLE, wet afternoon in the summer of 1980 the body of a 56-year-old man was discovered under very strange circumstances, lying on the top of a coaltip in the small town of Todmorden, in West Yorkshire.

In a society that has come to take violence for granted this is not, in itself, so startling. But, in fact, the appearance of – and the very name of – the dead man was to spark off a controversy and argument the likes of which this small, Pennine mill-town had never known. Indeed, in some circles, it was to become dubbed as Yorkshire's murder mystery of the century, and not a few people were to speculate that the answer lay not on this Earth, but a long way off it!

The victim was one Zigmund Jan Adamski, a coal-miner born in Poland, who had been a British citizen since the Second World War. In 1951 he married Leokadia (or Lottie) and from 1960 onwards they lived very happily in Tingley, a village not far from Wakefield.

Adamski was not a well man. He suffered from a heart complaint, narrowing of the coronary arteries, probably due to his chronic bronchitis but possibly to another, undiagnosed, lung disorder. He had been receiving some medical treatment, to which he was apparently responding well. He had never had a heart attack.

Lofthouse Colliery, the pit at which he worked, was due for closure in 1981 and Adamski had applied for an early retirement. This was not so much because of his own ill-health, but primarily because his wife, who suffered from multiple sclerosis, was confined to a wheelchair. Adamski obviously worried about leaving her alone during the day and wanted to have more time to look after her. However, his application was turned down by the Coal Board – which must have made him somewhat despondent.

Ironically, the board did have a change of mind and granted the application – but the letter came just a couple of days too late for Adamski.

While the emotional blow of this rejection might be considered relevant to subsequent events, it seems that Adamski accepted the board's decision philosophically. Superficially at least, he did not behave as if upset. Christopher Zielinski, a close and long-standing friend of his, spoke of the last time he saw him alive – Wednesday, 4 June 1980. They had a drink together, but Adamski went home early to take care of Lottie. He appeared to be his usual self. Mr Zielinski describes the Adamski marriage as happy and regards it as unthinkable that Zigmund would have voluntarily left his wife to fend for herself in view of her physical condition.

There were other factors that strongly argued against Adamski having motives to engineer his own disappearance. On Saturday, 7 June he was due to give his god-daughter away in marriage. He was very much looking forward to this. Also, the Adamskis had staying with them, on a long visit from Poland, Zigmund's cousin and her

son. They had been made very welcome, and on Friday, 6 June Zigmund and his cousin had gone into Leeds on a shopping trip.

Returning from Leeds early in the afternoon, Zigmund and Lottie, Zigmund's cousin and the boy, ate lunch together. Then, at about 3.30 p.m., Zigmund announced he was going down the road to the local shop to buy some potatoes. He walked out into the sunshine and had a quick, cheery word with a neighbour as he strolled down the street. Nobody was to see him alive again. His whereabouts were to prove a mystery

Above: Lofthouse Colliery, the pit at which Adamski had worked for many years and which was due for closure in 1981. He had applied for an early retirement but his application was turned down by the Coal Board. This, some think, may have preyed on his mind and contributed to an attack of amnesia. However, all the evidence indicates that Adamski had taken the rejection philosophically. Ironically, a few days after his body was found, a letter arrived from the Coal Board. They had changed their minds about his early retirement

– then on the afternoon of Wednesday, 11 June his body was to be found on a coaltip at Todmorden.

What happened to Zigmund Adamski? Why did he vanish so suddenly and mysteriously? Why was he found in Todmorden, over 20 miles (30 kilometres) from his home in a place where, so far as it is known, he had never been before? How did he manage to get on top of that pile of greasy coal, which was beside a railway line that was in constant use? These, and many other questions, contributed to the genesis of a baffling mystery – which the West Yorkshire police have never solved.

The body of Zigmund Adamski had some peculiar features. His shirt and his watch were missing but all his other clothing was intact. He had also not, apparently, been sleeping rough in the five days that he had been missing. There seemed to be one day's growth of beard, and he had eaten well – although forensic examination showed that he had not eaten on the day the body was found. Traces of grime and superficial scratches (possibly from the coal) were in evidence, but none of them appeared substantial enough to suggest he had been involved in any kind of struggle. It was also apparent that the body had been exposed to the pouring rain for at least a day.

However, the most unusual aspect of the body's appearance was an irregular patch on the back of his head, neck and shoulders where the skin had been burnt off. There were also traces of a greasy substance on this patch, possibly an ointment used to treat the wound. This 'burn' was to become a major feature in the controversy that followed. Its precise cause – although attributed to some

Trevor Parker, son of the owner of the coalyard where Adamski's body was found. Parker discovered the body at about 3.45 p.m. on the coaltip. The yard had been left empty – and the gates open for any deliveries – since 8.15 a.m. when, Mr Parker assured the police, no body had been there. Local enquiries led nowhere: nobody had seen a confused-looking stranger wandering around the area, nor seen him entering the Parkers' coalyard either by himself or with his possible abductors or assailants. The coroner, James Turnbull (below right), finally pronounced the case a mystery and declared an open verdict

sort of corrosive agent – was never identified.

Trevor Parker, the son of the owner of the coalyard, was the person who first discovered the body, at about 3.45 p.m. The yard had been empty since 8.15 a.m. – when, in Mr Parker's opinion, the body had not been there. However, the yard gates were left open, in case any lorry deliveries were made. As it happened, none were, that day. On finding Adamski the police and an ambulance were summoned. Two officers from the Todmorden force, PC Alan Godfrey and a colleague (who does not wish to be named), arrived at the scene at 4.10 p.m. On seeing the strange burn they immediately suspected a crime; and so the police investigation began.

Death at noon?

A post-mortem was conducted at the nearest mortuary, at Hebden Bridge, by a consultant pathologist from Halifax Infirmary, Dr Alan Edwards. This began at 9.15 p.m. He showed that Adamski's death was due to 'natural causes', that is heart failure probably directly related to his long-standing medical disorders. Death had occurred somewhere between 11.15 a.m. and 1.15 p.m. that day – which means that the body had been on the coaltip beside the busy railway line for perhaps three or four hours, in broad daylight. Presumably Adamski had crawled up there – an extremely difficult manoeuvre given the heavy and slippery surface. There was an alternative, of course. The body could have been put, by 'person or persons unknown', on the tip after death. But who would place a dead body on a coaltip in a prominent position in the middle of the day? And how would they get the body up there in the first place?

Clearly, it seems more likely that Adamski crawled onto the coal himself and then died. Indeed the very effort of this climb might have been instrumental in his death, as Dr Edwards later acknowledged at the inquest. But why did he do it? It is certainly tempting to consider the other suggestion, realising that the easiest way to place the body on the pile of coal was *from above*. Some instantly drew the conclusion that Adamski had been killed and then dumped there by a flying saucer!

The West Yorkshire police went to considerable lengths to try to solve the mystery of Adamski's initial disappearance and his death. For, in view of his wife's plight, it was a tragic case with great human interest. Twice the inquest was adjourned for further investigation, until at the third session on 25 September 1980 Coroner James Turnbull pronounced an open verdict, adding that he was frustrated at having to do so but could think of no other avenue that might be explored. The case has not been closed.

The mystery deepens

Police inquiries led to many blind alleys of alleged sightings of Mr Adamski (as such cases often do). There was much publicity; his photograph was circulated in the local newspapers in the hope of finding some clues. But despite a great deal of feedback from the public nothing of value emerged. All hospitals and doctors in West Yorkshire and surrounding counties were approached. There was no indication that the burn – which Dr Edwards was positive had been inflicted two days *before* Adamski's death but after he had vanished from home – had been treated locally, despite its serious nature. And yet it also seemed that it was not the burn that was responsible for his death, although it may have generated a state of shock that contributed to it. However, even if it had done so there was still no answer as to where Adamski had been for the three days before the burn had been inflicted. Adamski

Sunday Mirror

22p September 27, 1981 No. 958

First picture of the White Cliffs baby

FULL STORY AND MORE PICTURES — PAGE 5

BINGO Eyes down for Game No. 2 INSTANT BINGO

WIN £10,000 TODAY —See Page 3

AMAZING UFO DEATH RIDDLE

Experts baffled by burns on man

A MAN'S mysterious death is at the centre of one of the biggest UFO riddles in years.

His body was found with strange, unexplained burns in a town he had never visited before.

Experts believe that Police-born Reginald Adamski, 54, could have died of fright.

And one of two policemen called to the scene is said to have told of seeing a

By JOHN SHEARD and STEWART BONNEY

Extensive inquiries carried by West Yorkshire coroner Mr. James Turnbull failed to reveal any reason for Mr. Adamski's death.

And last week Mr. Turnbull said: "I'm quite convinced that supernatural forces have been involved in at least two cases in 21 years as a coroner."

Mr. Adamski, who lived quietly with his wife Lottie

Victim — Mr. Adamski with his wife Lottie

in Thornfield Crescent, Tingley, near Leeds, was found on a pile of coal in a yard at Todmorden 30 miles away. He had been missing for five days.

There were burns on his scalp, neck and the back of his hand from a corrosive substance that forensic experts could not identify.

Although they will not admit it publicly, West Yorkshire police are understood to have seriously considered the possibility that Mr. Adamski's death was somehow linked with the UFO sighting.

Mr. Turnbull said: "As a trained lawyer I have to rely on facts. Unfortunately we have not been able to uncover any facts which may have contributed to his death.

"I tend to believe that there may be some simple explanation.

"However, I do admit that the failure of forensic scientists to identify the corrosive substance which caused Mr. Adamski's burns could add some weight to the UFO theory.

"As a coroner I cannot speculate. But I must admit that if I was walking over Ilkley Moor tomorrow and a UFO came down, I would not be surprised. I might be gratified, but not surprised.

"I cannot believe that all the thousands of reports of this sort of phenomenon — covering almost every country in the world and going back through the ages — result from human error."

UFO investigators say

Continued on Page 2

Crunch day for Labour — Page 4

Priscilla Presley's new life —CENTRE PAGES

MY LOVER AGED 22, BY OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN —See Page 17

had apparently completely disappeared.

The publicity at this stage of police investigation was only local, providing headlines such as 'Wheelchair wife's death probe agony'. Aside from being a human tragedy it was also, as the Todmorden press quoted Coroner Turnbull as saying, 'an intractable mystery'. James Turnbull added that three key questions in the case remained unanswered. How did Adamski come by the unusual burn? Why was he not wearing his shirt? How did he get from Tingley to Todmorden and onto the coaltip?

Of course, these – and other questions connected with the case – do beg explanation. But after all the valiant efforts of the police no explanations were forthcoming. It was natural that Lottie Adamski should despair. But what is surprising is that during the second half of 1980 no national media channel picked up the story. Nor indeed was any paranormal solution put forward at this time. After all, many less thought-provoking tales have become the focus for widespread attention, and many a psychic puzzle has been spun from rather more down-to-earth circumstances.

The Adamski mystery assumed entirely new dimensions when the *Sunday Mirror* of 27 September 1981 carried a cover story linking the death with UFOs. It is very unlikely that the story would have been taken up by the national press had the dead man's name been anything but Adamski. A mysterious disappearance and an inexplicable death in a strange place, together with the 'magic' name Adamski, assured the story of banner headlines, no matter how prosaic the facts might have been

The Manchester-based UFO study group, MUFORA, did take notice of the local stories and did see the potential for an anomalistic explanation. Indeed what brought the matter immediately to the group's attention was the dead man's name. For Adamski (while not uncommon in Poland) is rare in Britain. And yet, in the world of ufology, it is probably the most famous name there is.

George Adamski was a Polish/American café owner who caused a global sensation in the 1950s by writing several best-selling books that described his alleged meetings with aliens from Venus, Saturn and other planets, and his trips with the 'spacemen' to their home planets. The books assured Adamski a place in history as the most famous contactee (or alleged contactee). Today few ufologists give much credence to his fanciful tales. They generally believe it was the public who were taken for a ride, not Adamski. But some disagree. Timothy Good, a well-respected British UFO researcher, and German writer Lou Zinstagg, collaborated to produce *George Adamski: the untold story* (1983), which presented him in a much more favourable light.

An impressive coincidence

But whether George Adamski was a crank or genuine contactee, the coincidence of the names impressed MUFORA. However, at that stage the group was worried about distressing Mrs Adamski further and it was felt unjustified to approach her so soon after her husband's death. And so the matter drifted.

However, on 28 November 1980 – five and a half months after Zigmund Adamski's death – something else very strange happened. Again it would seem to have been just a 'coincidence', but it was destined to have a far-reaching impact on MUFORA's interest in the whole affair and in particular on the speculations about Adamski's death.

Just after 5 a.m. on that November night PC Alan Godfrey, one of the two officers called to the coaltip where the body was found, had a close encounter with a UFO (see page 1546). Indeed it practically landed on the roof of his police car. Subsequently he found that he had 'lost' 15 minutes; 15 minutes that were to be reconstructed under hypnosis with the aid of MUFORA, leading to the apparent memory of a fantastic contact and medical examination on board a landed spacecraft. The scene for this landing was Burnley Road, Todmorden – under a mile (1.6 kilometres) from the coaltip where Adamski had been found.

The possibility that Zigmund Adamski's death was in some way connected with UFOs was no longer beginning to look quite so ludicrous.

Did UFOs play a part in the fate of the two Adamskis as some believe? See page 3058

The lady is a pope?

It seemed that Pope John was a pope like any other – until, during an official procession, 'he' gave birth to a healthy baby. Such, at any rate, is the legend; GRAHAM FULLER and IAN KNIGHT examine the evidence for such an outrageous and extraordinary story

THE SHOCKING AND HERETICAL story of Pope Joan, the female Vicar of Christ, who allegedly became pope by passing herself off as a man, until nature caught her out and she delivered a child in the very midst of a papal procession, is one of the most scandalous rumours ever to concern the Vatican. Summing up one of the most extraordinary legends of the medieval period in his *Lives of the popes*, published in 1479, the Italian historian Bartolomeo Platina wrote,

> Pope John VIII: John, of English extraction, was born at Metz and is said to have arrived at Popedom by evil art: for disguising herself like a man, whereas she was a woman, she went when young with her paramour, a learned man, to Athens, and made such progress in learning under the professors there, that, coming to Rome, she met with few that could equal, much less go beyond her, even in the knowledge of the scriptures; and by her learned and ingenious readings and disputations, she acquired so great respect and authority that upon the death of Leo by common consent she was chosen Pope in his room. As she was going to the Lateran Church between the Colossean Theatre and St Clement's her travail came upon her, and she died upon the place, having sat two years, five months, and four days, and was buried there without any pomp. This story is vulgarly told, but by very uncertain and obscure authors. . . .

Above: Pope Joan is delivered of a child in the midst of a papal procession in this 15th-century illustration from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The *Lives of the popes*, published in 1479 by the humanist scholar Bartolomeo Platina (left, seen with Pope Sixtus IV in the Vatican Library), records that Joan dressed herself in a man's clothes and accompanied her lover to Athens, where she 'advanced in various sciences and none could be found to equal her'. On her return to Rome she was 'unanimously' elected pope

At first glance, it hardly seems surprising that the story should have gained such widespread acceptance, since it is mentioned in a variety of contemporary documentary sources. The first of these is the writing of Anastasius Bibliothecarius, an educated Roman living in the ninth century, who made a brief reference to the story in a manuscript history. Anastasius was the custodian of the Papal Library, and was involved in papal affairs to such an extent that, on the death of Leo IV in 855, he was put forward as his successor, until his personality proved unsuitable, and Pope Benedict III replaced him. Since Pope Joan's brief reign was supposed to have happened about this time, Anastasius's commentary may be supposed to be of the greatest importance.

Certainly, his story seems to have proved popular with subsequent generations. Martinus Scotus, a monk from the Abbey of St Martin of Cologne in Germany, who died in 1086, wrote: 'A.D. 854, Lotharii 14, Joanna, a woman, succeeded Leo, and reigned two years, five months, and four days.' Sigebert de Gemblours, who died in 1112, added some further information: 'It is reported that this John was a female, and that she conceived a child by one of her servants. The

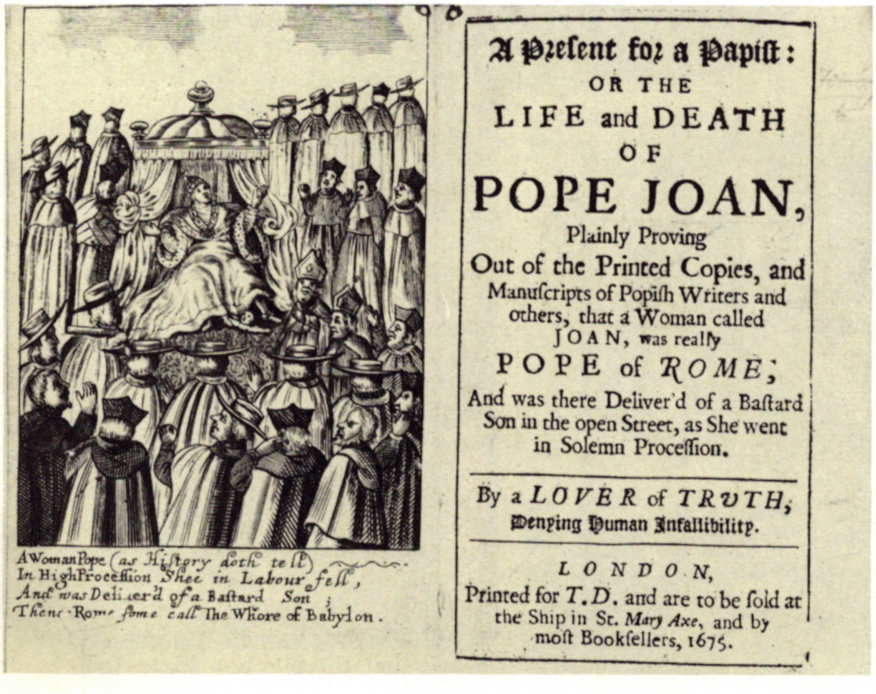
Pope, becoming pregnant, gave birth to a child, whereof some do not number her among the Pontiffs.' Stephen of Bourbon (d. 1261), writing in *De septem donis Spiritu Sancti* ('Of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit'), confirmed the outline of the story, but was reticent about the details. According to him, the mysterious papess was nameless, and her pregnancy was already well-advanced by the time she assumed the post. Indeed, her reign was so short that it was during the very inauguration ceremonies that she gave birth, and the irate crowd immediately dragged her out of the city and stoned her to death for her sacrilege.

In other medieval accounts, details of Joan's life differ slightly. In some accounts her name is given as Hagnes or Gilberta, and one source suggests she was Pope Leo IV's wife, who ruled in his place after his death. The most popular version of the story is given by Martin of Troppau, however, in *Chronicron pontificum et imperatum* ('The chronicle of the popes and emperors') in the 13th century:

> After Leo IV, John Anglus, a native of Metz, reigned two years, five months and four days. And the pontificate was vacant for a month. He died in Rome. He is related to have been a female, and, when a girl, to have accompanied her sweetheart in male costume to Athens; there she advanced in various sciences and none could be found to equal her. So, after having studied for three years in Rome, she had great masters for her pupils and hearers. And when there arose a high opinion in the city of her virtue and knowledge, she was unanimously elected Pope. But during her papacy she became in the family way by a familiar. Not knowing the time of the birth, as she was on her way from St Peter's to the Lateran she had a painful delivery, between the Coliseum and St. Clement's Church, in the street. Having died after, it is said that she was buried on the spot. . . .

Right: Pope Pius V (1566–1572), in a painting by El Greco. Pope Joan allegedly gave birth to her child while in papal procession between the Coliseum and St Clement's Church. The spot is said to have been marked by a large slab of stone – until Pope Pius, evidently sensitive to the potential embarrassment of the story, had it removed

Below: a pamphlet of 1675, entitled *A present for a papist: or the life and death of Pope Joan*. The legend of the female pope enjoyed a new popularity after the Reformation, when Protestants – this pamphleteer was a self-styled 'lover of truth, denying human [papal] infallibility' – used it to demonstrate the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church


A Woman Pope (as History doth tell)
In High Procession Shee in Labour fell,
And was Deliver'd of a Bastard Son;
Thence Rome some call The Whore of Babylon.
A Present for a Papist:
OR THE
LIFE and DEATH
OF
POPE JOAN,
Plainly Proving
Out of the Printed Copies, and
Manuscripts of Popish Writers and
others, that a Woman called
JOAN, was really
POPE of ROME;
And was there Deliver'd of a Bastard
Son in the open Street, as She went
in Solemn Procession.
By a LOVER of TRUTH,
Denying Human Infallibility.
LONDON,
Printed for T. D. and are to be sold at
the Ship in St. Mary Axe, and by
most Booksellers, 1675.

The site of Joan's death, indeed, was said to have been marked by a large slab of stone, with a classical inscription, until Pope St Pius V (1566–1572) had it destroyed. Until the reign of Leo X (1513–1521), it was customary for all papal candidates to undergo an inspection to prove their sex – an attempt, it seems, to prevent a woman becoming pope again.

It is no coincidence that, in the 15th century, the papacy sought to eliminate references to Joan, for in Europe the Reformation was afoot, and Protestant pamphleteers had seized on the story, and delightedly used it as a stick with which to beat the orthodox clergy. The story became more lurid with each telling. Anxious to prove the innate corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestants suggested that not only was Joan's first lover a Benedictine monk, but her later seducer a cardinal – or, on one occasion, the very Devil himself.

The secularisation of learning, one of the by-products of the Reformation, also brought about a new questioning spirit that was to knock the first serious holes in the story of Pope Joan. David Blondel (1590–1655) was a French country pastor and man of letters, inclined towards the Calvinist faith. Despite this, he was renowned for his liberal sympathies, and was something of an iconoclast. He took a long,

hard look at the papal histories – although his conclusions, published in 1647 in his *Eclaircissement familier de la question; Si une femme a été assise au siège papal de Rome* ('Popular solution of the question; whether a woman had been seated on the papal throne in Rome'), were to earn him the displeasure of his fellow Protestants.

First on his list was Anastasius who, it must be remembered, was living in Rome at the time of Joan's alleged papacy, from 855 to 858, and was intimately involved in the Vatican's politics. The first thing that struck Blondel was that the comment concerning Joan was clearly a later insertion, added in the margin. Furthermore, stylistically, it was reminiscent not so much of Anastasius, the supposed writer, but of Martin of Troppau, who was active some 400 hundred years later. Not only that, but the insertion seemed to be in a different handwriting, and was totally at odds with the facts as given in the unadorned history. As Blondel put it,

> it is absolutely impossible that anyone could have been Pope between Leo IV and Benedict III., for he [Anastasius] says;– 'After the prelate Leo was withdrawn from this world, *at once* all the clergy, the nobles, and people of Rome hastened to elect Benedict; and at once they sought him, praying in the Titular Church of St. Callixtus, and having seated him on the pontifical throne, and signed the decree of his election, they sent him to the very-invincible Augusti Lothair and Louis, and the first of these died on the 29th September 855, just seventy-four days after the death of Pope Leo.'

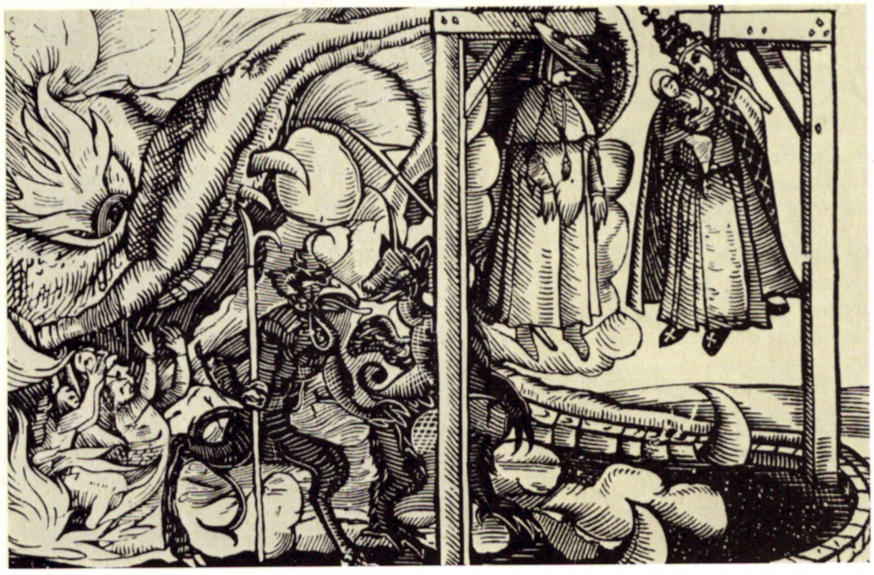
Even allowing that Anastasius has discreetly drawn a veil over his own part in the papal election of 855, he is so specific on dates that he scarcely allows time for the very precisely recorded reign of 'two years, five months, four days' ascribed to Joan. With the severest of doubts thus thrown on his most contemporary source, Blondel moved forward with a thoroughness a modern detective would envy. Martinus Scotus was next on his list. Living in Germany, hundreds of miles from Rome, in a time when communications were notoriously poor, more than 200 years after the event, his account was immediately suspect. What is more, Blondel found further signs of tampering. In some copies of the Scotus manuscript, the story of Pope Joan was told baldly, as a fact, but in others it was worded differently, implying that it was a matter of hearsay, and in some it was left out completely. Then there was Sigebert de Gemblours, whose *earliest* manuscript, once again, did not refer to the legend. Neither does the *Chronicle* of Guillaume de Nangiac, written in 1302, which incorporates and expands much of Sigebert's work, contain any reference to a female pope.

In short, Blondel discovered that the three oldest accounts of Joan's life all showed signs of interference that implied that, in their earliest form, they had made no mention of the story. In each case, the details of Joan's life appeared to have been added much later. Since the details of the story were all similar to that popularised by Martin of Troppau in the 13th century, Blondel considered that that worthy, or his followers, had been to blame, since they were 'much more given to all these kind of fables'.

Sanctis Manibus
Venerabilis, ac Doctrinâ Celeberrimi Viri,
D. DAVIDIS BLONDELLI,
Theologi & Historici laboriosiss. meritiss.
EPIGRAMMA.
, Authori lethalis.
OC 54
FAMOSÆ
QVÆSTIONIS,
An fœmina ulla inter Leonem IV, & Benedictum III. Romanos Pontifices, media federit,
ANAKPIΣIΣ.
Certatim à fexcentis plus minus annis, de *Ioanna Anglica* Moguntiaco oriunda fermo percrebuit, quę *fexum mentita virilem*, Romanis eo fucceffu impofuiffe fertur, ut, communibus poft Leonis IV dormitionem votis, ad pontificale folium evecta fuerit. Nec ante Ænęæ Sylvii Piccolominei (qui poftea Pius II dictus eft) tempora repertus ullus, cui falfi fufpicio fuboleret. Acceffere circa A. D. 1534 & 1550 Ioannes Thurmair Aventinus, & Michael Buchingerus Colmarienfis, qui factum palam negare cœperunt, cum Onuphrio Panvinio Auguftiniano A. D. 1568 Martii 14 defuncto; quem Thomas Hardingus, Nicolaus Sanderus, Alani Copi larvâ rectus Nicolaus Harpsfieldus, Gilbertus Genebrardus,

Below: David Blondel (1590–1655), a French country pastor with Calvinist leanings, who was the first to attempt an objective appraisal of the legend of Pope Joan. He published the result in 1647 (below right). Analysing the written sources of the legend, he found that the three earliest were contained in marginal additions – and that the original manuscripts made no mention of Pope Joan

Bottom: a 17th-century woodcut showing Pope Joan's death. Accounts of Joan's end are various; in this one, she and her baby are shown hanging from a gallows like common thieves, while a dragon's mouth devours them and the flames of hell beckon



The earliest genuine reference to a female pope therefore remains the account of Stephen of Bourbon; and he did not name the lady, and credited her with far fewer adventures than do the other accounts. Other chroniclers in the subsequent century gave her names as different as Margaret and Jutt, and her nationality as English or German. Martin was the first to elaborate the details of her early life, and to call her John or Joanna. So authoritatively does he relate the tale that few historians who came after him can have thought to challenge him.

The last hope of those who would seek to prove that there was a Pope Joan is that

somehow the chronicles may be mistaken as to her dates. Alas, the reigns of the ninth-century popes are quite clearly delineated. Leo IV, Joan's supposed predecessor, reigned from 847 to 17 July 855; Benedict III succeeded him on 1 September of the same year. Benedict himself reigned for two and a half years, and was succeeded by Nicholas I within days of his death.

It is true that there was a Pope John VIII in the ninth century, and that he was in Rome in the 850s, as archdeacon of the Church of Rome. He did not, however, become pope until 20 years later, and his 10-year reign was primarily concerned with repulsing attacks by Muslims across the Mediterranean. To this end he built a wall around the papal citadel, and encouraged religious and political unity in Europe in the face of outside heathen pressure. His reign is well-documented, and several of his letters survive; there is not the slightest hint that he was a closet transvestite. Quite how he became associated with the legend is not known.

Where, then, did the idea of a female pope start? Probably it originated in the 10th century. It was a miserable time, even by medieval standards. The Holy See was embroiled in various political wranglings involving European powers, and a succession of popes seemed to contrive to outdo each other in their amorality. The papacy was revered for the power it wielded, and the incumbents felt few scruples about killing or torturing to attain or retain it. Pope Stephen VII, who acquired the throne in 896, had his dead predecessor dug up, and the corpse tried for misdemeanours, then thrown into the Tiber. Stephen himself came to a sticky end shortly after, strangled by an irate mob, and the next four popes came and went so quickly that they are scarcely remembered. The fifth, Leo V, was imprisoned by a rival and tortured to death. His rival succeeded him, but lasted only four months. He too was killed, by Sergius III, who was to reign from 904 to 911. Sergius was widely rumoured to be putty in the hands of his mistress, Theodora, the wife of an important Roman senator. When Sergius died, Theodora and her beautiful temptress daughter, Marozia, set about controlling his successors with a mixture of violence and debauchery that would have done the Borgias proud. For 20 years Rome was dominated by this 'regiment of women', and the pious were wont to complain that 'We have women for Popes.' Surely it was rumours of this period that, distorted by time and distance, inspired Stephen of Bourbon to write his tale of a female pope. Alone among the chroniclers, he makes no mention of names, and places the incident nearer to his own time than the ninth century, in about 1100. Whatever her worth as a symbol of corruption, or her value as an inspiration to artists, there is no evidence that Pope Joan ever truly existed.

La Papesse, or the Woman Pope, from the Tarot pack. The card is said to represent Pope Joan; in divination, it stands for the qualities of intuition, inspiration and subconscious memory – and can also indicate lack of foresight

The Antichrist enters Rome dressed as a pope, in an illustration from a 15th-century French manuscript. Some of the wilder versions of the Pope Joan story suggest that Joan's lover was the Devil – and that her child was the Antichrist. Not surprisingly, critics of the Church found useful ammunition in the legend

A little give and take

Does the intelligence of our household pets owe something to paranormal influences from us? And do we in return receive unsuspected benefits from them? FRANCIS KING discusses our bond with animals

LORD GARDENSTONE, A SCOTTISH JUDGE of the 18th century, was extremely fond of pigs in general and one pig in particular. Except when he was actually sitting in his judicial capacity he was always accompanied by his pet sow, the animal following him about as though it were a dog.

One morning, reports *The dictionary of national biography*, a visitor called on Gardenstone at an early hour, well before the time at which the judge normally got up. The visitor was shown into the judge's bedroom, still in semi-darkness, and stumbled over some enormous object 'which gave a terrible grunt'. Upon which Lord Gardenstone explained: 'It is just a bit sow, poor beast, and I laid my breeches on it to keep it warm all night.'

But another source quotes Lord Gardenstone as giving a different explanation as to why, each night, he allowed his pet sow to use his clothes as bedding: it warmed them, and he found it pleasant to don warm clothes on a cold morning.

There is no reason to doubt the truth of either explanation. Doubtless there was, as an economist might say, an exchange transaction from which both parties benefited – the pig was pleased to have a comfortable bed, the judge was pleased that his breeches were warmed. Such exchanges typify the relationship between most pets and their owners; both parties are the gainers. This is provided, of course, the pets are mammals or birds. The exact nature of the benefits received by either party to the transaction in question is difficult to determine when the pet is something highly exotic – a giant African cockroach, for example.

A dog grieves for its dead master in Landseer's *The old shepherd's chief mourner*. The bond between dogs and human beings is almost uncanny: stories of dogs apparently knowing telepathically of their masters' deaths are legion

With a normal household pet, such as a cat or dog, some of the advantages derived from the relationship are obvious. The animal receives warmth, food, care when it is sick, grooming, affection and so on. The owner receives a certain amount of admiration, particularly from a pet dog (which seems to regard its owner as head of the pack – literally as the 'top dog'). He also receives companionship, and – a very important psychological consideration – a sense of being needed, of being the most important factor in the physical and emotional life of a member of another species.

But human beings gain many less obvious benefits from close relationship with domestic animals. The value of pets in soothing, comforting, cheering and reassuring people who are unhappy, mentally or physically ill, or under stress, has been demonstrated in numerous scientific studies.

That pet owners are less likely to be anxious or depressed than those without pets is perhaps not surprising. One might say that a pet owner has the welfare of another

'person' beside himself to consider and is therefore less likely to brood upon his own problems. But research has shown that pet ownership may also be of benefit in such a very physical disorder as heart disease.

A team of American researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the Department of Health Science, Brooklyn College, New York, carried out a survey of 92 patients admitted to hospital suffering from coronary disease. Of the sample 92, pets were owned by 53 patients. While these latter were in hospital most of them expressed concern about the welfare of their pets and as soon as they were well enough to do so most of them made daily telephone calls to the friends or relatives looking after the pet. Some of them were so worried about their cat or dog that they regularly had 'conversations' with it on the telephone.

One might have guessed that worry about their animals would place an additional strain on the coronary patients and make their recovery less likely. But the survey showed that exactly the reverse was the case. Of the 53 pet owners no less than 50 (94 per cent) were still alive a year after leaving hospital; of the 39 non owners only 17 (43 per cent) were surviving at the end of the same period. So marked was the disparity in recovery rates that it was suspected that, by some freak of chance, the group of patients who did not own pets were on average much more seriously ill than the others. Investigation showed that this was not so and that the improved rate of survival was 'independent of the patient's health status'.

Some indication of the reasons for this remarkable rate of recovery among pet-owning coronary patients may be provided by the results of some other American research. It was found that there was a rise in the blood pressure of both men and women when they were engaged in conversation with other people. When, however, the same group of subjects were engaged in petting and 'talking' to dogs their blood pressure fell. Interestingly enough, a study of children in their homes revealed a similar fall in blood pressure when an animal was present, even if there was no visible interaction between child and pet, such as stroking or vocal communication.

Below: the tranquil interior of a tropical fish tank. Research has demonstrated that watching pet fish lowers the blood pressure – and thus is probably beneficial to health

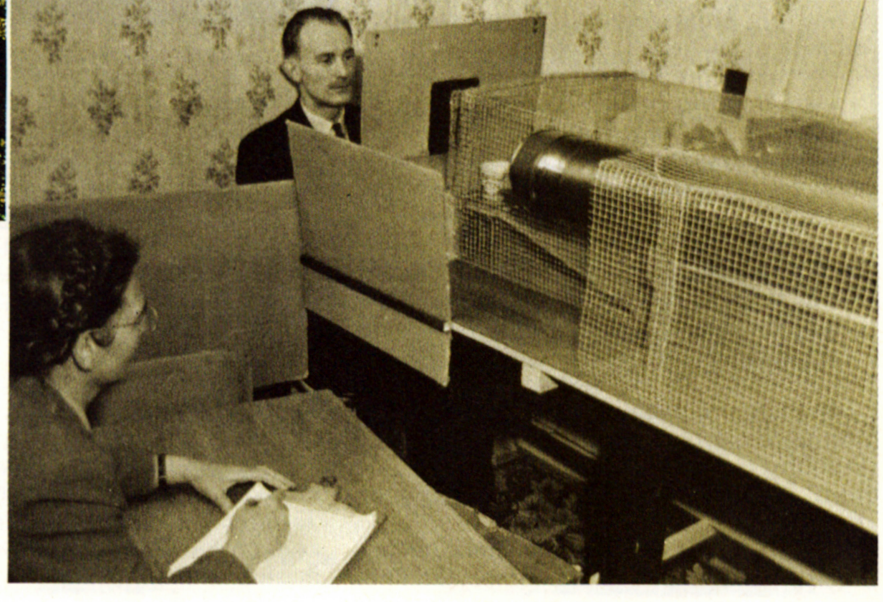
Bottom: in the 1950s Karlis Osis, a psychologist, and his assistant Esther Foster investigated the psychic abilities of cats. A cat approached two cups, in one of which there was food. If the cat picked that cup, it was rewarded with the food. If it did not, it received a mild electric shock 'to remind it to use its ESP next time', as Osis put it. He claimed to have obtained statistically significant results indicating the existence of ESP in the cats

Still waters

Even those pets not biologically capable of interaction with human beings seem to produce the same beneficial effects. This point was demonstrated by an American experiment involving tropical fish. The subjects were first placed in front of a blank wall and instructed to do nothing but look at the wall; their blood pressure, both systolic (measured when the heart is contracted) and diastolic (when it is expanded), was then measured. The subjects were then placed facing a tankful of tropical fish. As they watched the fish both their systolic and diastolic blood pressures fell. The fall was greatest among those whose blood pressure was high for their age and weight. One particularly interesting feature was that the falls in pressure were quite large, matching those achieved in other groups by biofeedback (see page 979) or by prolonged practice in such relaxation techniques as yogic meditation.

Tropical fish are not very rewarding to talk to or cuddle. If watching them can noticeably reduce blood pressure it can be easily understood that contact with a cat, a dog, or even a parrot, is likely to have the same effect to a greater degree. The reduction of a coronary patient's blood pressure is, of course, regarded as of great importance in his return to health.

Animals that are close to mankind, which have regularly been petted and made 'part of the family' – whether they are cats, dogs or something more unusual, such as Lord Gardenstone's enormous and much-loved



Above: Sammy, the pet grey squirrel of an Oxfordshire family makes itself a nest – using paper tissues and the bowl of a food mixer. Pet owners are familiar with the intelligent adaptations to the human environment made by their animals. But the pets do not often have to cope with as many bolts and catches as this chimpanzee does (left) when dealing with an intelligence test. However, they often show great ingenuity in finding ways of opening refrigerators and food cupboards

sow – seem to sense when their owners are ill or mentally disturbed.

Such a sensitivity to the individual's condition cannot, by its very nature, be tested under laboratory conditions. But many pet owners are convinced that such awareness does indeed exist, and they provide much anecdotal evidence of their own experience of it. For example, people who suffer from violent changes of mood have reported that their pet cats and dogs will immediately imitate their behaviour. Sometimes such awareness of the owner's emotional state is attributed to 'animal telepathy', sometimes to a pet's recognition of the significance of signals that are unconsciously broadcast by the human being, whether by touch, smell or behaviour.

Some serious researchers into the paranormal have considered that the anecdotal claims of pet owners may have some validity. Thus J. B. Rhine, perhaps the best known of all parapsychologists, wrote

> the number of reported cases [of animal ESP] is large enough to suggest that animals can somehow be affected by circumstances they could not be aware of by any sensory sign and which one would suppose they could hardly understand in human terms. . . .

Dr Karlis Osis, who for some time worked at Rhine's parapsychological laboratory, has claimed statistically significant results from controlled tests of animal ESP that he conducted with cats. Unfortunately, claims Dr Osis, cats are even more difficult experimental subjects than human beings: with a researcher they like results are very good; with ones they dislike they are proportionately poor.

The claims made by some animal owners regarding their pets' extra-sensory abilities extend into what most of us would regard as the realms of fantasy. Dogs exhibiting mediumistic powers, cats endowed with the gift of psychic healing, horses with visible haloes – all are recorded in the wilder literature of Spiritualism.

But there are rather more firmly based reports by pet owners of animals learning to behave remarkably intelligently. Thus, pets frequently learn to cope with the door fasteners of new refrigerators so that they can help themselves to food, within minutes of the refrigerator's installation.

Can it be that the morphogenetic fields posited by Rupert Sheldrake (see page 1141) extend across the barriers between species? That the intelligence of animals is increasing as a result of their contact with their human masters and companions?

Further reading

Wolfgang Kohler, *The mentality of apes*, Routledge 1973

D. J. McFarland (ed.), *The Oxford companion to animal behaviour*, Oxford University Press 1981

Joan McIntyre (ed.), *Mind in the waters*, Charles Scribner's Sons (New York) 1974

John Sparks, *The discovery of animal behaviour*, Collins 1982

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
After reading your article on the Pollock twins [issue 134], I feel compelled to write to you because my wife and I are convinced that our youngest son Lewis has provided evidence in support of reincarnation. Lewis is only three years old.

First, he can remember being in the womb and says that before that he was in a 'field full of soldiers'. He can remember when streetlamps were lit by gas, and says he 'walked on the cobblestones and lit all the lamps with a long pole'. When asked what the lamps looked like, he raised his hands, making a trident form with his body; however, he doesn't know where the lamps and cobbled streets were.

More remarkable was his identification of a print on our dining room wall; it depicts a clutch of Siamese cats looking up at a butterfly. We were sitting at the table and Lewis gazed at the picture for a moment, then announced that there was a 'trooder' in the picture. When, some time later, I took the picture off the wall for cleaning, I saw a trade note on the back giving the title – *The intruder*!

We asked our son how he knew these things; he replied that he had 'been here before', and carried on with his game. Perhaps the most baffling thing of all is Lewis's obsession with 'pipes'. Anything tubular is a 'pipe', and Lewis says he once had lots of 'pipes' but cannot remember what sort they were, or for what they were used; whenever we go out he is constantly looking for 'pipes'. Once, when we were out in a wood we had never been to before, Lewis said he wanted to get 'the green pipe'; he got it, a length of garden hose. The same thing happened next day; again we went for a walk in a wood, and Lewis said he wanted 'the big white pipe'; he got it – it was a tube of white plastic under a holly bush. How did he know these things were there? He went straight to where they were found on both occasions. He even dreams about 'pipes', and we can only guess that his obsession caused him to have out-of-the-body experiences while asleep and that he 'found' the pipes in this way. It is certainly all very strange to us.
Yours faithfully,
D. J. Hills Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Dear Sir,
I have had several experiences of UFOs, perhaps the most spectacular of which happened in the early hours of 11 January 1978, when I was living near Gloucester.

Just before 5 a.m. I went downstairs to get a glass of water. When I returned and opened my bedroom door the room was glowing pink. I looked out of the window and saw an enormous red object like a huge tower with six yellow lights, one beneath the other.

I could not believe my eyes and opened the window in the hope of seeing other witnesses, but there was no one around.

I telephoned the police station and a young constable came to the house. He watched the object with me, but could not explain what it was. He suggested it might be the television mast at Much Marcle, just under 20 miles [32 kilometres] away, but I could see the mast on the horizon: it appeared as tiny red dots, with no shape at all.

The object stayed high in the sky for about an hour before it finally disappeared.

Next day, I reported my sighting to the local newspaper, and an account appeared a few days later, asking for further witnesses. But, strangely, no one else seems to have seen it.
Yours faithfully,
Joan Mandeville-Dell (Mrs) Camborne, Cornwall

Dear Sir,
On a recent visit to York I stopped for a drink in a picturesque pub opposite the Minster, the York Arms, and soon got into conversation with the landlord. Bearing in mind Frank Smyth's article entitled 'A large measure of spirits' in issue 115 of *The Unexplained*, I asked the landlord if his pub had a ghost. It transpired that not only did it have a classic 'Grey Lady', but that she was something of a celebrity in York, regularly doing a walkabout in a small area close to the Minster.

Rumour has it that she is the ghost of an unfortunate nun who, an unspecified number of centuries ago, hanged herself in her cell. The York Theatre Royal was built on the site of the convent and one of the dressing rooms is believed to incorporate the nun's cell. The 'Grey Lady' begins her 'walk' from here. She has apparently caused great consternation among the more psychic members of the company, especially one actor who bumped into her on the stairs and promptly fell down them. From the theatre she proceeds in a straight line through a row of buildings that incorporates solicitors' and estate agents' offices and hotels, ending her walk in the private rooms above the York Arms (although she has been known to drift unconcernedly past terrified cleaning ladies in the bar). A former landlady of the pub had a tray knocked out of her hand by 'a tall woman in grey robes who made the room cold'.

The local tourist board has compiled a kind of 'good ghost guide' to York, and visitors regularly wander around the haunted parts of the city. So far, it seems, no one has come face to face with the Roman cohort mentioned in your reply to S. Darlington's letter in issue 35, which once tramped through the basement of the Treasurer's House, or with Charles II who once, it is said, tried to make enquiries of a desk porter at the university, before fading away – or, indeed, with the 'Grey Lady'.

The professionals, however, appear to have had more luck. A team of 'ghost-hunters' (presumably parapsychologists) from Delft University in the Netherlands visited the York Arms and got positive results. Their monitoring equipment recorded distinct 'cold spots' and inexplicable noises in the landlord's private rooms. And, after the research team had gone, the daughter of the family discovered her bedroom curtains tied up in a tight spiral, similar to that described by the poltergeist-ridden Harper family in Enfield [see issue 123].

Although ghosts may be part of Britain's national heritage – and we may grow to be fond of them, at a distance – perhaps it is a good idea not to make an exhibition out of them?
Yours faithfully,
Daisy Farge London

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

The voice of reason

When 'believers' and 'sceptics' about the paranormal run out of arguments, the odds are that they will proceed to psychoanalyse each other. The result is a proliferation of theories as to which psychological, sociological, political or religious pressures may have induced the blindness in the opposite camp that prevents them seeing the truth that should be self-evident. PIET HEIN HOEBENS discusses the advantages and shortcomings of such an approach

Being a moderate disbeliever in extra-sensory perception, ghosts, flying saucers and life after death, I do not think that I will learn the ultimate truth about the paranormal by psychoanalysing those people who are unable to share my scepticism. However well-founded, conjectures about the believers' motives do not relieve the sceptic of the duty to evaluate the believers' arguments. (It goes without saying that this also applies to believers' conjectures about the motives of sceptics.) I happen to be one of those old-fashioned individuals who believe in something called objectivity – that is, I think that beliefs are true or false regardless of the psychological needs or powers of argument of those who hold them.

So even if someone were to demonstrate to my satisfaction that all believers in the paranormal are raving lunatics, this would not disprove the reality of the paranormal – any more than all those threadbare theories about scepticism being the result of materialist-reductionist prejudice, if true, would disprove scepticism.

All the same, I think that some insight into the 'needs' of the antagonists is vital if we wish to understand something of the nature of the public controversy over the paranormal. Many people appear to have a strong inclination to disregard David Hume's sound advice that we should not believe more than is warranted by the available evidence. To such people, 'evidence' is an instrument to convert the heathen; they themselves would be happy to embrace the truth without any proof at all. When invited to provide an empirical foundation for their claims, many will gravely proffer evidence that can be seen at a glance to be flawed. Even if it is possible to convince them that this is the case, however, this does not have the slightest effect on the strength of their beliefs. To them, 'evidence' is apparently no more than an illustration of a truth – not a rational foundation of a belief. If the evidence turns out to be spurious, well, that means only that we have picked the wrong set of illustrations.

What moves these people? I cannot avoid remarking that I have been struck by the fact that most believers, asked *why* they believe, give strikingly similar replies: almost always, these replies will be, essentially, 'Don't you think there must be *something*?'

Transcendent reality

Now there is something peculiar about the way these people use the word 'something'. It never refers to physical, biological or astronomical somethings – but always to a transcendent level of reality, a reality in which a deeply felt 'impossible' wish may turn into a fact. Psychologists tell us that children inhabit a magical universe where teapots dance the foxtrot and pigs have wings. Might not much belief in the paranormal be prompted by an unconscious longing for that paradise from which the angels of reason have expelled us?

Attractive as such conjectures may be, they belong to the realm of poetry rather than to that of science. They may enable us to make an intuitively plausible guess as to why so many otherwise sensible persons eagerly embrace paranormal claims on the basis of arguments they would find preposterously weak in any other context. However, they tell us little – if anything – about the most fundamental question of all: do paranormal phenomena exist or not, and if they do, what is their nature?

We may hope to settle this matter only by means of that venerable, time consuming and frequently misunderstood process known as science. Whatever the shortcomings of the scientific method, it has the unique advantage that it urges its practitioners to transcend the limitations of human psychology by devising a systematic defence against the kinds of errors that their 'needs' and 'motives' may otherwise induce them to make. It is not easy, but some people have succeeded in persuading themselves by this means to give up beliefs to which they were emotionally attached or to accept as real what they would have preferred to believe did not exist.